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SOME RECENT WORKS ON FRENCH
VERSIFICATION.

1. *La Versification française et ses Nouveaux Théoriciens*, par Charles Aubertin. Paris, Belin Frères, 1898. Pp. 328.
2. *Le Vers Français et les Prosodies Modernes*, par Jules Guillaume. Paris, Fontemoing, 1898. Pp. 226.
3. *A History of French Versification*, by L. E. Kastner. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1903. Pp. 312.
4. *Études sur la rime dans "Cyrano de Bergerac" de M. Rostand*, von A. Schenk. Diss. Kiel, 1900. Pp. 111.
5. *Studien über den Reim bei Théodore de Banville*, von Dr. Heinrich Grein. Diss. Kiel, Cordes, 1903. Pp. 72.
6. *Der Versbau A. de Lamartines*, von H. Gerhard. Diss. Leipzig, Schmidt, 1902. Pp. 83.
7. *Zum Versbau Mistral's*, von A. Buchenau. Diss. Marburg, 1901. Pp. 135.
8. *Zum Reim- und Strophenbau bei Mistral nebst einer übersicht über seine Rhythmik*, von J. F. Rack. Diss. Marburg, 1902. Pp. 63.
9. *Esthétique de la Langue Française*, par Remy de Gourmont. Paris, Mercure de France, 1899. Pp. 323.
10. *De la Rime Française*, par P. V. Delaporte. Paris, Soc. de Saint-Augustin, Desclée, de Brouwer et Cie, 1898. Pp. 233.
11. *Essai de Prosodie Française (vers sans rimes)*, par P. Jean-Dupré. Paris, Plange, 1904. Pp. 58.
12. *La Rythmicité de l'Alexandrin Français*, par Fredrik Wulff. Lund, 1900, Universitets Årsskrift, xxxvi, 1. No. 6. Pp. 79.

Within the last decade there has been a marked activity in the field of French versification—studies of special authors' verse technique and histories of the entire field. The works here reviewed have been chosen as representative of two types—histories with original contributions, and histories reviewing the work already done; studies or theses showing originality and the true research spirit, and studies for which little can be said as to their value.

In a history of French versification we would naturally expect to find an account of the historical development of all the principles of verse technique, with their gradual changes and the reasons therefor. In the three histories under review, we find this account in the first only. Aubertin remains to-day the most satisfactory, the most concise and clearest (although not the most scholarly, for this honor belongs to Stengel) treatise written within the last ten years. It is a

book that may be read with profit by the student and specialist.

The second book by Guillaume would hardly leave a clear view of what French verse is; too technical and theoretical, lacking clearness and precision. We find a lengthy discussion of the various schools. The chapter discussing rhythm, accent and hemistich, reviewing the theories of Scoppa, Ackermann, Ténint, and Van Hasselt, of whom he is a follower, is the most satisfactory. Most Belgians that have written on French verse have shown a false conception of what French versification really is; at least, false according to the French and leading German verse theorists. This work can hardly be called a contribution to actual verse study, but an ingenious application of a theory of verse principles applied to a verse system that will not answer to it. It is worth reading, however.

The last work by Kastner is distinctly a contribution, presenting original investigation, showing extraordinary work, but scarcely a trace of ability to interpret results. It is most unfortunate that with all his splendid work he has been able to do nothing but note facts, page after page, with no meaning or interpretation. It remains a reference book of exceptional value to the student.

Numerous studies on individual authors have been published, and these may be grouped: 1. as studies on one especial feature, such as rhyme; 2. as studies of the verse technique of an author. Of the former, there are two works that are almost epoch making for minute details, accuracy, and delicate ingenuity in fine, hair-splitting distinctions in rhyme.

Two serious criticisms must be made on studies of French verse almost without exception: 1. If the list of works in the bibliography of these various studies shows the extent of the reading of these authors, then statements such as the following must be taken with many grains of salt: "Die über französische Verslehre vorhandene Litteratur habe ich nach bestem Wissen und möglichst vollständig benutzt." (Cf. Grein, p. 5). There are twenty-five works mentioned. This criticism applies to every study that has come under the hands of the reviewer (Stengel excepted). Kastner even fails to mention 2, 4, 5-12 of the works mentioned in this review; not

even Stengel's great work is mentioned, but quoted.

2. The works of the authors treated are never treated chronologically, and seldom in their complete form.

Grein has found over two hundred different rhymes and grouped these under about seventy-five headings. There is a minute tabulation of rich rhymes, of the consonne d'appui, the frequency of its occurrence, the quality of rhyme vowels, as well as statistics on diphthongs and dissyllables: *bien*, *lien*, etc. Many points of interest are brought to light; thus, considering all of Banville's innovations outside of rhyme, we naturally would expect much variety and freedom in the use of the final consonants of rhyme; but such is not the case. Even assonance and alliteration are studied with their effects upon rhyme. The variety of possibilities, mentioned in the work, to strengthen rhyme is most astonishing. The tendency to the belief that there is no art or science in the marshalling of words for rhyme effect must certainly find a check in such minute observations and results, as presented in these two studies. The real value of these facts remains yet to be interpreted; they are still mere dry facts. This kind of work shows most conclusively, even to one who cannot appreciate French verse in all its technique, what a powerful instrument the mere sound and arrangement of words according to sound values is in French verse. From this point of view these studies are of the utmost value. A most striking and curious phenomenon is that 60 per cent. of Banville's rhymes have same grammatical form; *e. g.*, adjective + adjective. In Rostand we find but 29 per cent. This grammatical division of rhymes is most ingenious. The noun + noun category has eight divisions. I quote examples: 1. *fanatisme-romantisme*; 2. *Camoëns-Rubens*; 3. *douceur-penseur*; 4. *Bismarck-Danemark*; 5. *arbres-marbres*; 6. *charmilles-filles*; 7. *Troie-proie*; 8. *canicule-Hercule*. The logic of the divisions becomes at once apparent.

The study of Gerhard would have been valuable had he examined Lamartine's complete works in chronological order and thus shown how his earliest writings differed from those written during his happiest and most successful period of life and

those he produced in the period of financial stress. As it is, there is nothing in the thesis that was not known before. Such rhymes as: *ciel-soleil*, *découvre-trouve*, *hymnes-cimes*, etc. (cf. p. 54), are striking; as isolated cases they mean little, but studied with regard to the development of his technique, interesting results might be obtained. The work as a whole shows little originality and much less knowledge of the general subject and literature of versification.

The work by Buchenau shows much care, but deals mainly with the variants in Mistral's editions, with the language and spelling—vowel combinations in the interior of words, hiatus, elision, etc. A last chapter deals with a comparison of Modern Provençal with Old Provençal and Old and Modern French. The thesis is of more value and interest to a student of Provençal than to French versification.

Rack is simply a continuation of the preceding, dealing with the question of rhyme and strophe structure. His conclusion is that in general Provençal verse follows technically and structurally the same laws as the French, with some slight variations due to the peculiarity of the language. Provençal rhyme is for the ear exclusively and not for the eye, and there is more rigor and consistency in vowel sounds, points in which Modern French verse is sadly in need of reform.

One of the best treatments, if not the best, of the technical or mechanical aims of the new schools of poetry and what they have accomplished is to be found in the book of de Gourmont. There are chapters on the origin and value of words, on "Le vers libre" and "Le vers populaire." For those interested in the doings of the later schools of poetry the book is to be recommended especially.

De la rime française, by Delaporte, is not one of the most scholarly works, but it shows much originality, a wide reading, and above all intelligent thinking, which makes it an extremely suggestive and helpful work. The development of rhyme is discussed from its origin to the present day. Delaporte believes, with many others, rhyme to be a purely physiological or pleasurable product. The whole verse form with rhyme developed from Popular Latin. Whether the Alexandrine came from the Asclepiad, Alcæic or

Sapphic makes no difference ; it probably never came from any, but was a general gradual formation from the breaking up of the Latin. He quotes examples of every variety of modern rhyme to be found in the Twelfth Century. The great difference between the rhyme of the Seventeenth and that of the Nineteenth Century is this : in the Seventeenth "la pensée entraîne la rime," in the Nineteenth rhyme suggests thought in most cases. Formerly the idea came first and excited the author to express his thoughts in verse and rhyme ; he had the idea and sought the rhyme ; in modern verse the poets have the rhymes and seek the thought.

The modern men have the gift and imagination of rhyme. The classics have the gift and imagination of thought. Throughout his book Delaporte throws out most suggestive thoughts while at the same time giving the history of rhyme in all its phases—origin, history, nature, laws, caprices. On the whole, an admirable, helpful, and suggestive work.

Jean-Dupré has invented or worked out a system of French metrics and applied it to verse. It is very simple. The French language is especially made up of and well adapted to the anapaestic rhythm (v v -), and with its substitutions he writes verses of from two to five feet—epic, lyric and dramatic poetry without rhyme. Cæsura is obligatory in all verses of four feet or over. The work hardly deserves notice except as a curiosity and to warn the public.

Considering the reputation as a scholar and metrician the work of Wulff deserves more attention. In general it may be said that Wulff belongs to the school that is opposed to all the innovations of the modern poets, but would like to see some poet use the French system of versification and enlarge it with the Classical Greek and Roman systems. He laments the fact that the French are so far behind other nations in adopting reforms in versification. A poet, according to him, bold and wise, sure and acute in his handling of sounds and rhythm could do now for verse what Victor Hugo did for prose almost a hundred years ago. Wulff considers Rostand's versification and rhythm exceedingly poor and wretched. He believes in the equalization of all syllables as much as possible and in preserving the melodic accentuation of each

syllable. He who listens to hear the rhythm will be satisfied by the dynamic equalization ; he who listens to hear the sense will be satisfied by the natural tones. The French language is perfectly capable and as capable as any modern language to satisfy any rhythmic scheme. Shorts and longs are possible, but such a scheme of mechanics is not cherished by the French. If the French object to a system that involves stresses such as are found in other systems, is that not proof enough that the nature of the language does not lend itself to such a system ! So many of the Dutch, Belgian and German scholars still adhere to this theory. For them every verse scheme necessarily rhythmical is made up of feet of two, three, four, five, or six syllables, constituting a measure or foot or metrical unit, each unit must vary in the accentuation ; no two, three, four, five, or six syllables can form a unit without carrying with them some definite quantity or accent—this applied to French leads to the fundamental difference between the two principal schools of theorists. Based on this scheme, felt and understood in this way, a type of verse such as Rostand and Verlaine wrote must seem highly unrhythmical. A discussion of this theory, however, would carry us too far. According to Wulff, for example, *aimez* = v - ; *aimez-vous* = - v - ; *n' aimez-vous pas* = v - v - ; *n' aimez-vous pas mieux* = - v - v -, from which is seen that the language lends itself naturally to the mechanical system of stress and accent, which is strongly opposed to the sudden and abrupt changes of rhythm in Rostand's verse. This argument or conception of French versification forms the basis of Wulff's contention against the verse of Rostand, to which his work is a protest. To follow Wulff in his schemes of *rhythmicité* would be of little value, and lead to no plausible results. We believe that his fundamental conception of French versification is wrong ; but his work none the less merits a close study.

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